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(54) **REINFORCED COMPOSITE VEHICLE WHEEL AND METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION THEREOF**

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USPC 301/37.107
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Related U.S. Application Data

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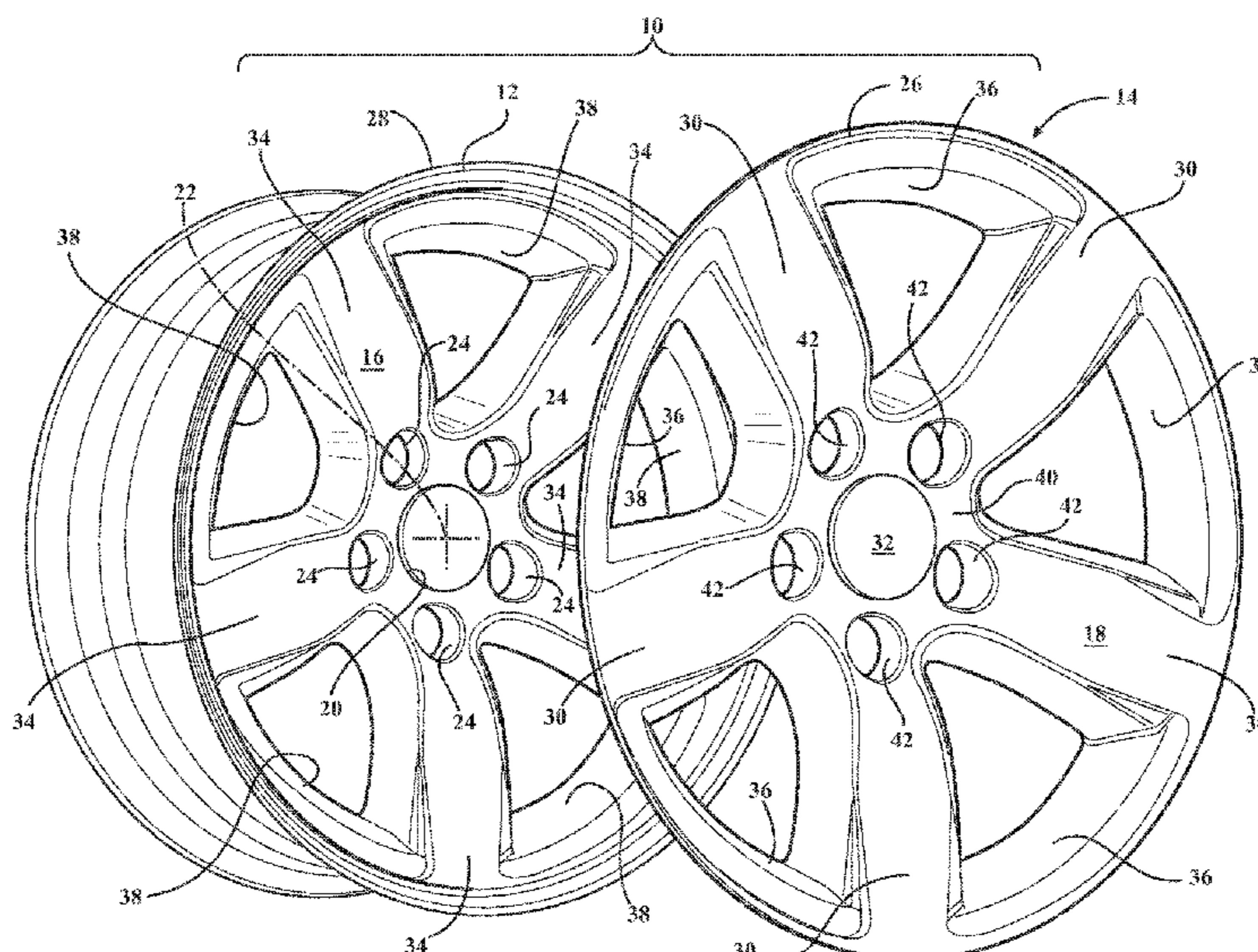
(57) **ABSTRACT**

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B60B 3/10 (2006.01)
B60B 21/12 (2006.01)
B60B 7/06 (2006.01)
B60B 5/02 (2006.01)

A composite wheel assembly and method of construction thereof is provided. The composite wheel assembly includes a wheel having an inwardly facing surface, an outwardly facing surface, a generally cylindrical barrel portion, and a plurality of apertures formed about a central hub aperture. At least one wheel cladding is fixedly bonded to at least one of the inwardly facing surface, the outwardly facing surface, and the generally cylindrical barrel portion. The wheel cladding increases the stiffness and/or strength of the wheel between about 2-16% or greater as compared to the wheel not having the at least one cladding.

(52) **U.S. Cl.**
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19 Claims, 8 Drawing Sheets



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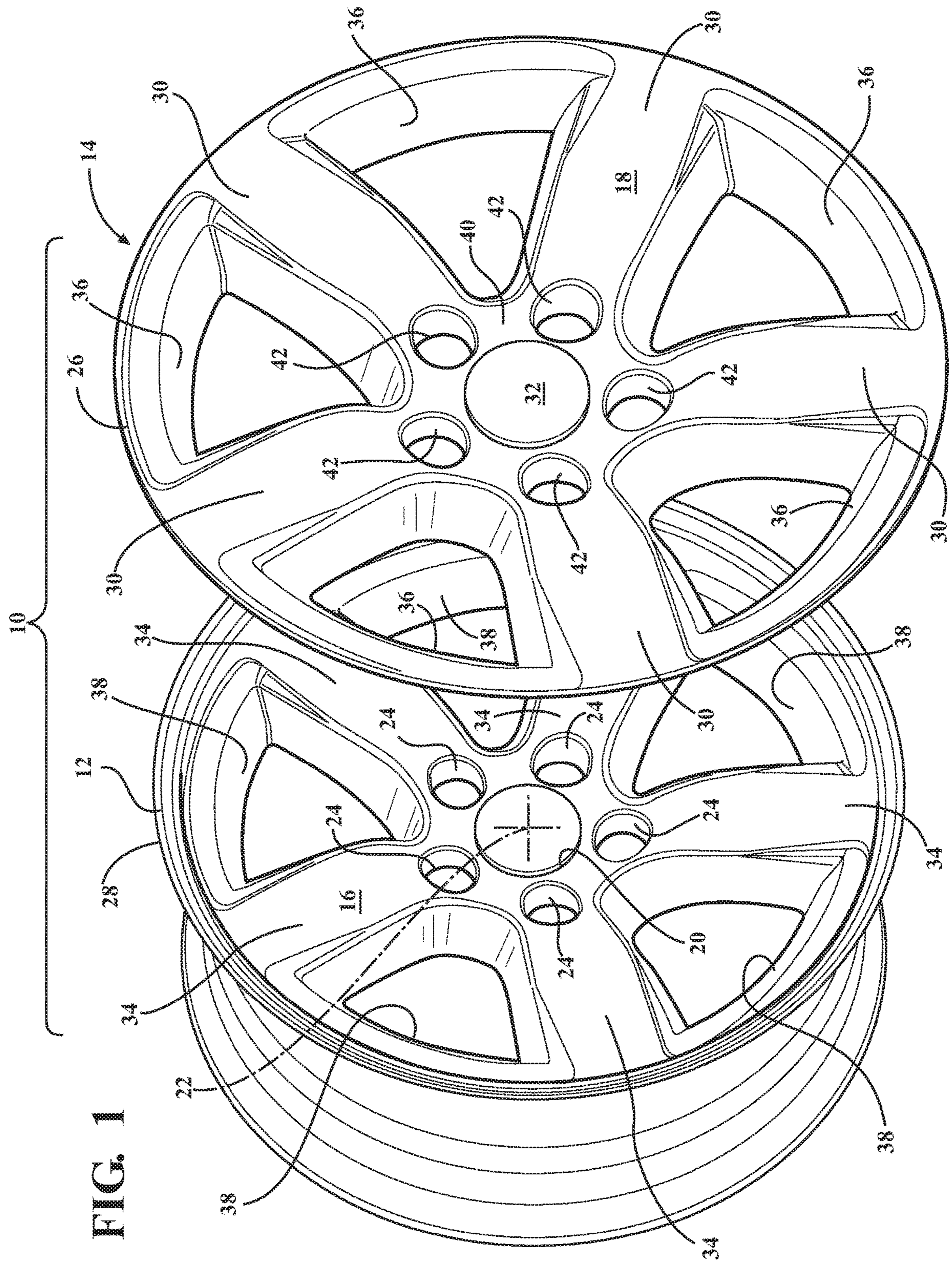


FIG. 1

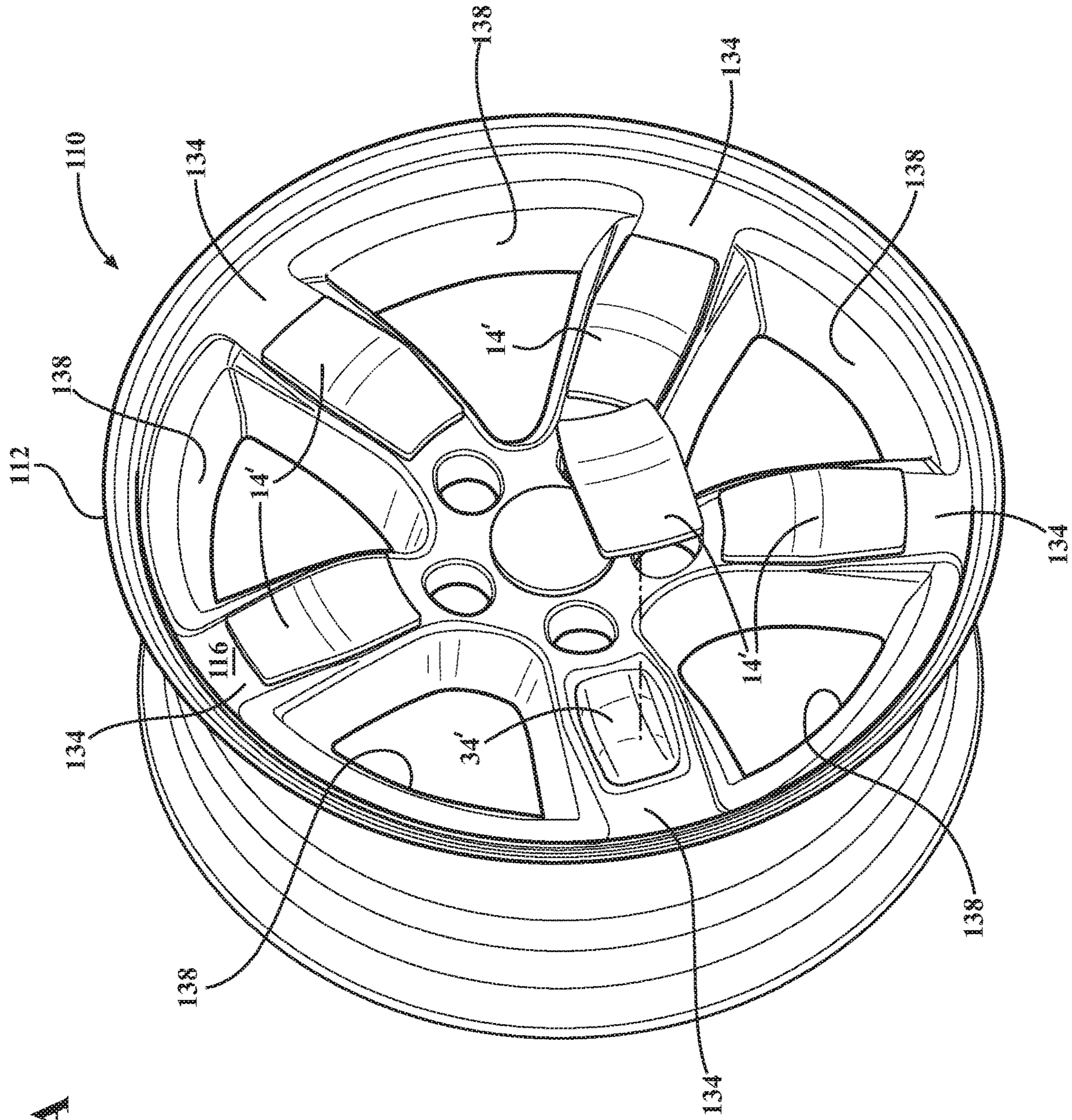


FIG. 1A

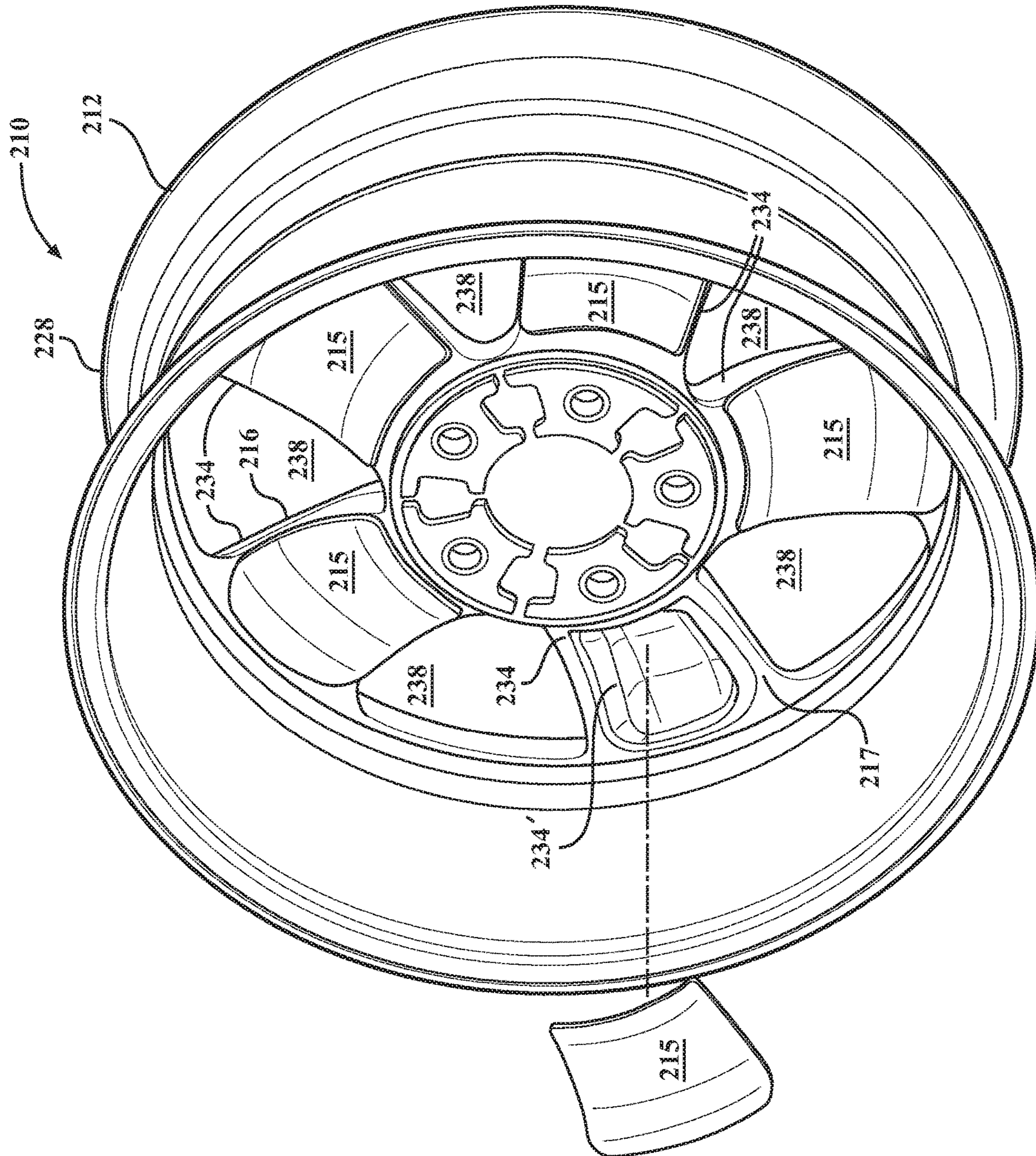


FIG. 2

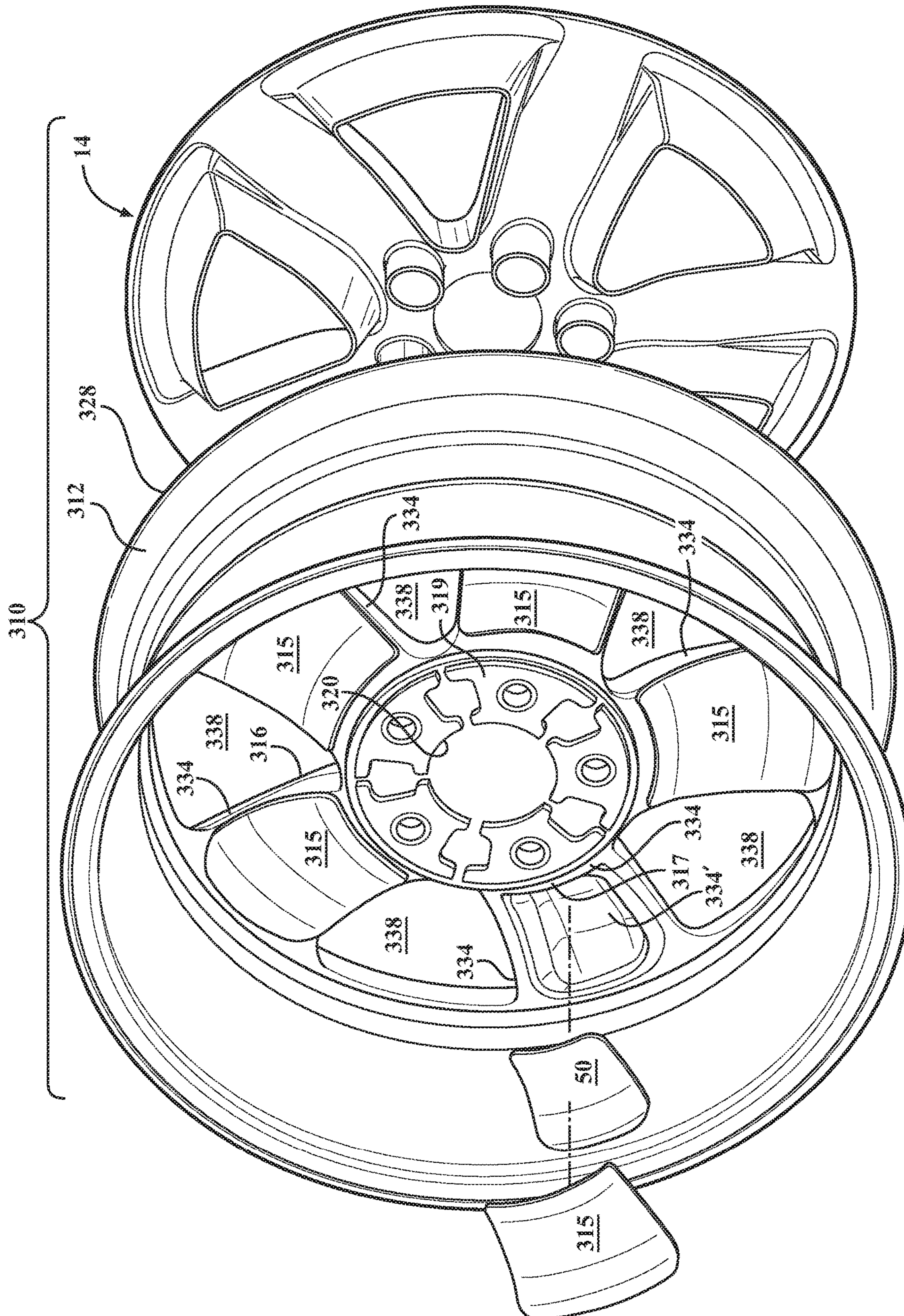


FIG. 3

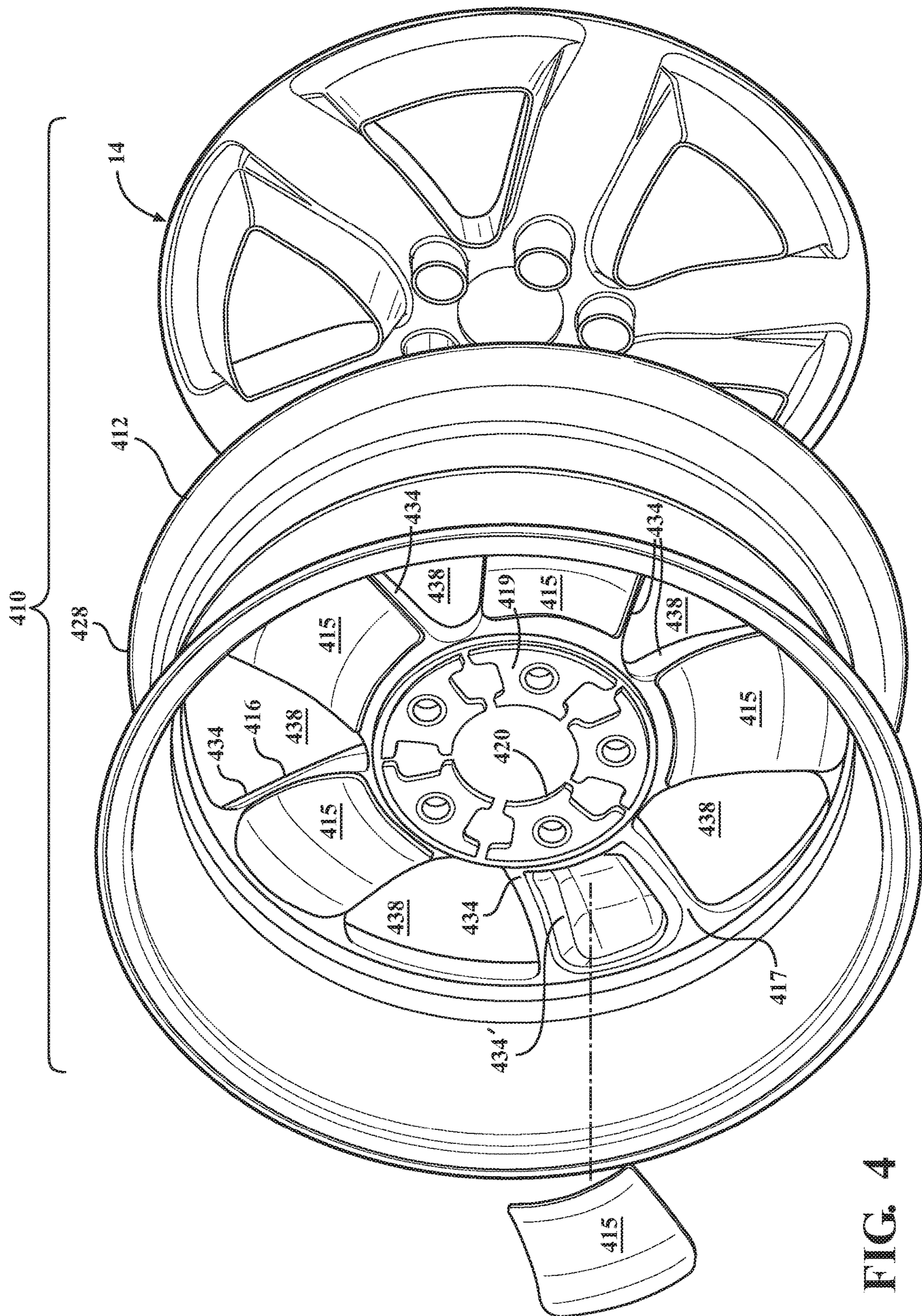


FIG. 4

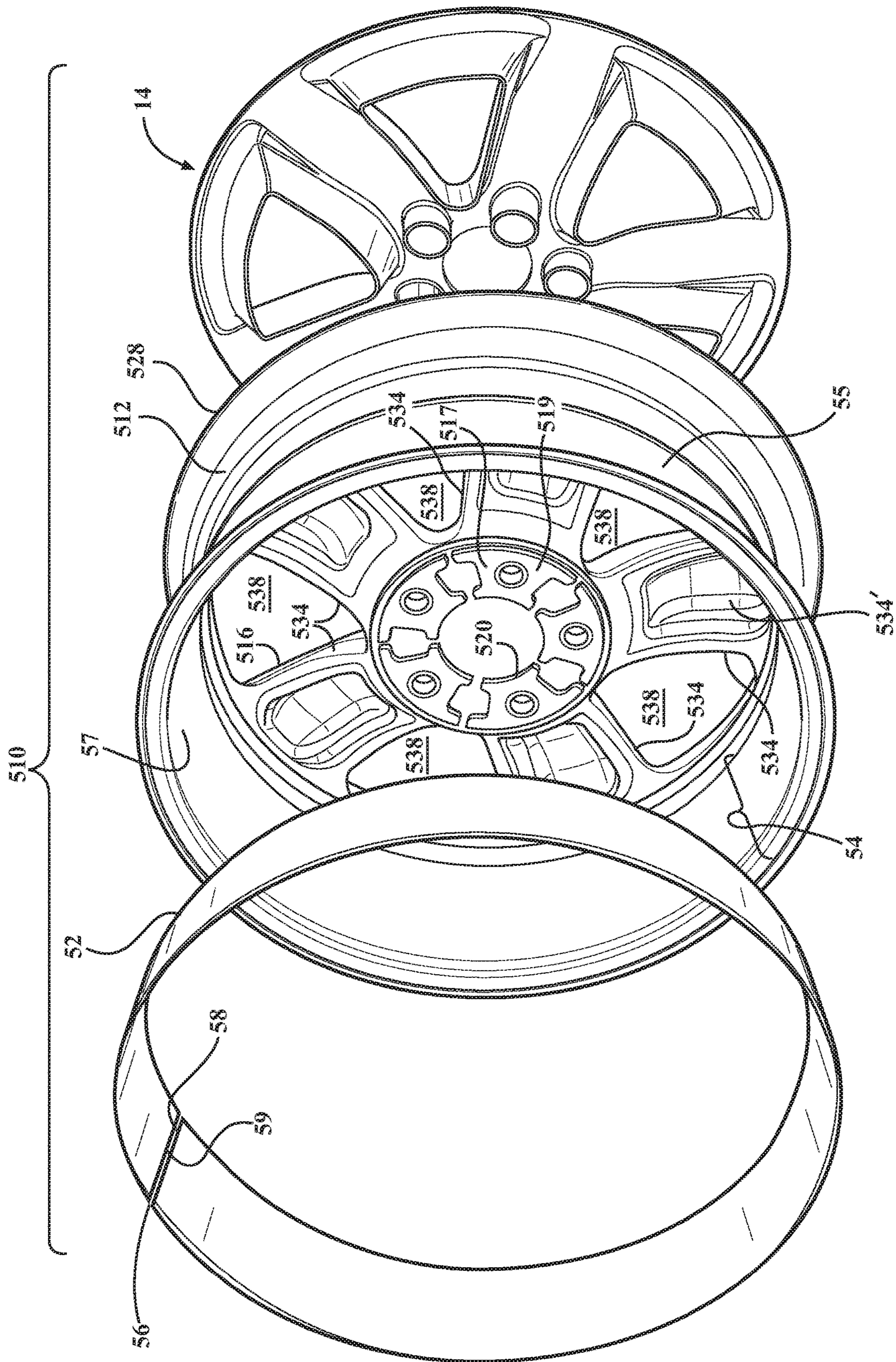


FIG. 5

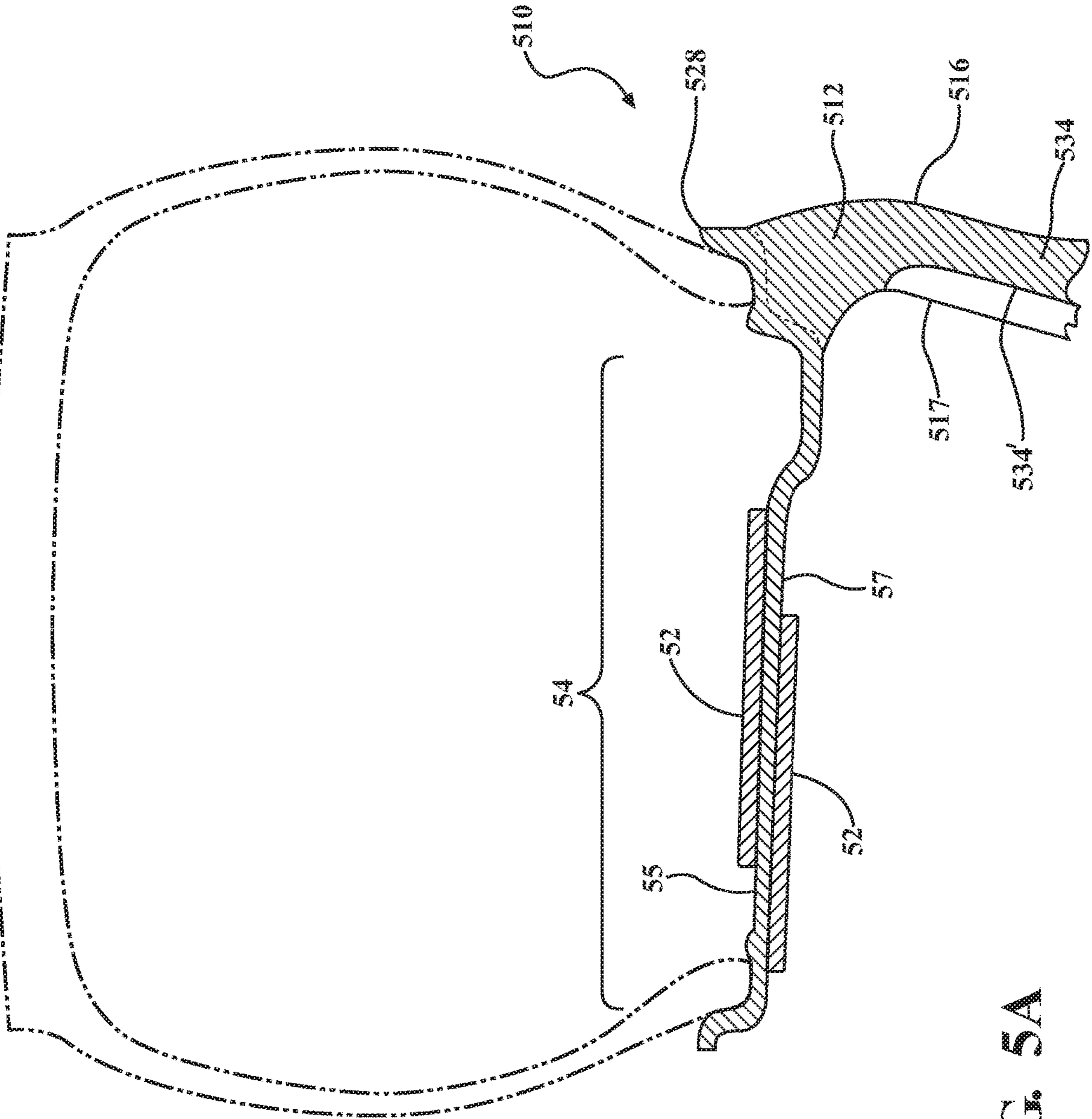


FIG. 5A

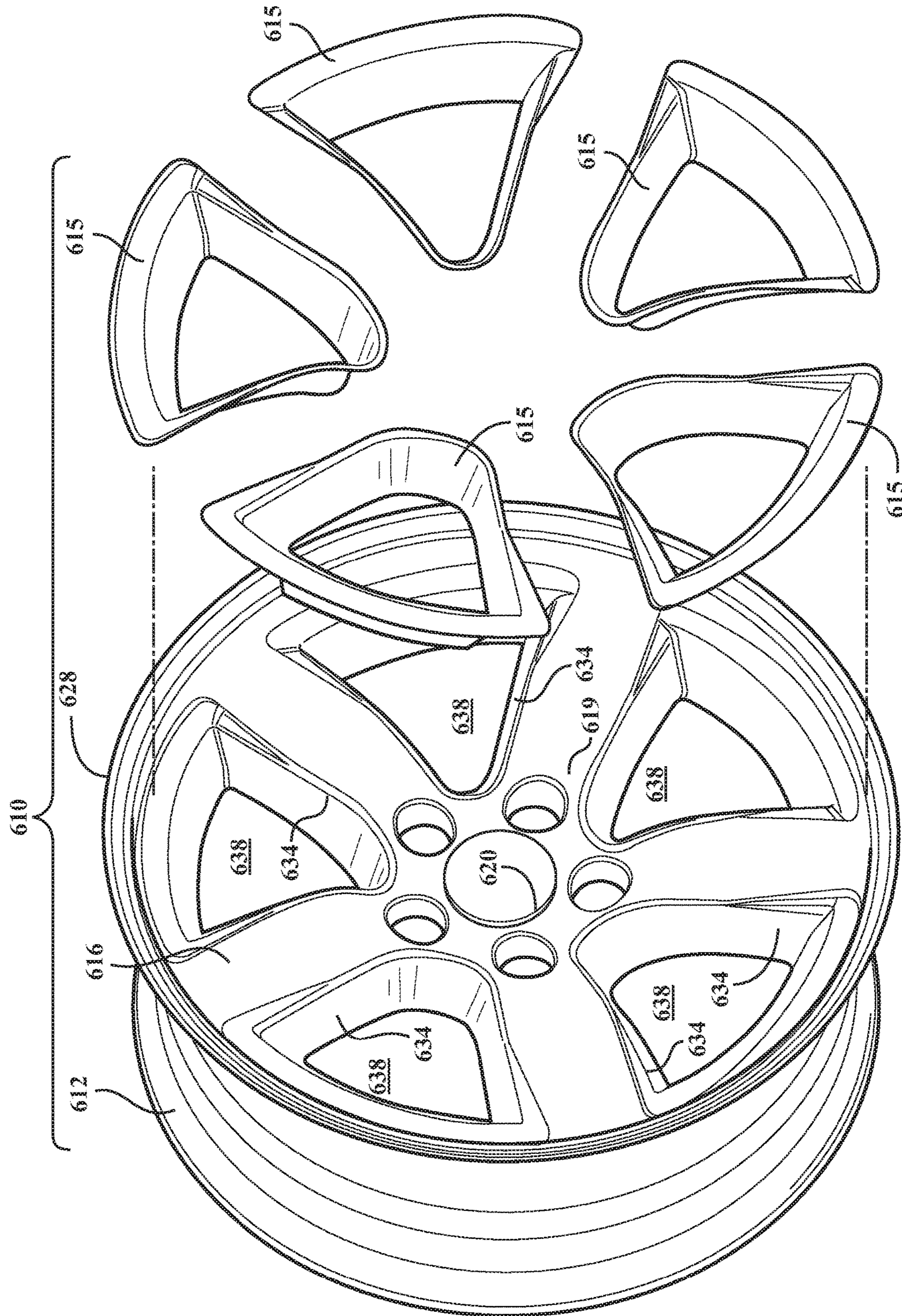


FIG. 6

1

REINFORCED COMPOSITE VEHICLE WHEEL AND METHOD OF CONSTRUCTION THEREOF

CROSS-REFERENCE TO RELATED APPLICATION

This application claims the benefit of U.S. Provisional Application Ser. No. 62/418,580, filed Nov. 7, 2016, which is incorporated herein by reference in its entirety.

FIELD OF THE DISCLOSURE

The present disclosure relates generally to automotive vehicles, and more particularly to a composite vehicle wheel assembly that yields increased stiffness.

BACKGROUND OF THE DISCLOSURE

Vehicle wheel assemblies have taken on more aerodynamic shapes and have been reduced in material thickness to enhance the ride performance and appearance of modern, high performance vehicles. It is known to provide wheel assemblies with plated surfaces or a cladding of thin plastic over the wheel outboard surface to enhance their aesthetic appearance. Although the appearance of the wheel assemblies is enhanced by these plating and cladded surfaces, the strength and bending stiffness of the wheel assemblies is largely unaffected by their presence. As such, the metal material that forms the wheel must provide the entirety of the strength and bending resistance required for the vehicle. Although the metal can be formed to meet the strength and bending resistance requirements, it comes at a cost, including increased weight and size of the wheel, as well as the cost of the metal material itself.

SUMMARY OF THE DISCLOSURE

This section provides a general summary of the present disclosure and is not intended to be interpreted as a comprehensive disclosure of its full scope or all of its features, aspects and objectives.

One aspect of the present disclosure is to provide a composite wheel assembly comprising a wheel having an inwardly facing surface and an outwardly facing surface, a plurality of apertures formed about a central hub aperture, a plurality of spokes extending radially outwardly from the central hub aperture, and a plurality of turbine openings formed between the plurality of spokes; and at least one wheel cladding fixedly bonded to at least one of the inwardly facing surface and the outwardly facing surface of the wheel, the wheel cladding enhancing the stiffness and/or strength of the wheel between about 2-16% or greater.

Another aspect of the present disclosure is to provide a wheel cladding being formed of at least one of the following materials: carbon fiber, fiber-glass, molded thermoplastic or thermoset polymer, Kevlar®, an alternative metal, or any other non-standard plastic material.

Another aspect of the present disclosure is to fixedly bond the wheel cladding to the wheel via at least one of urethane foam, a room temperature vulcanization silicone adhesive, or an alternate adhesive, such as epoxy or silicone-based hot melt adhesive.

Another aspect of the present disclosure includes providing the at least one wheel cladding includes a single, monolithic piece of material having a central hub region, an outer peripheral rim, and a plurality of spokes extending

2

radially between the central hub region and the outer peripheral rim fixed to the outwardly facing surface of the wheel.

Another aspect of the present disclosure is to provide the at least one wheel cladding with a plurality of separate wheel claddings fixed to at least some of the spokes.

Another aspect of the present disclosure is to provide at least some of the spokes having a recessed pocket extending into the outwardly facing surface and providing at least some of the wheel claddings being fixed within the recessed pockets.

Another aspect of the present disclosure is to provide at least some of the spokes having a relief pocket formed on the inwardly facing surface of the spokes and to provide at least some of the at least one wheel cladding including insert members disposed in each of the relief pockets.

Another aspect of the present disclosure is to provide the at least one wheel cladding including an annular stiffening band secured to a generally cylindrical barrel portion of the wheel to impart stiffness to the wheel.

Another aspect of the present disclosure is to provide the annular stiffening band abutting a radially outwardly facing outer surface of the generally cylindrical barrel portion.

Another aspect of the present disclosure is to provide the annular stiffening band abutting a radially inwardly facing inner surface of the generally cylindrical barrel portion.

Another aspect of the present disclosure is to provide the at least one wheel cladding including a plurality of annular wheel claddings fixed within the turbine openings.

Another aspect of the present disclosure includes a composite wheel assembly including a wheel having an inwardly facing surface, an outwardly facing surface, a generally cylindrical barrel portion, and a plurality of apertures formed about a central hub aperture. The composite wheel assembly further includes at least one wheel cladding fixedly bonded to at least one of the inwardly facing surface, the outwardly facing surface, and the generally cylindrical barrel portion, wherein the wheel cladding enhances the stiffness and/or strength of the wheel between about 2-16% or greater.

Another aspect of the present disclosure includes a composite wheel assembly including a wheel having an inwardly facing surface, an outwardly facing surface, a generally cylindrical barrel portion, and a plurality of apertures formed about a central hub aperture. The composite wheel assembly further includes at least one wheel cladding fixedly bonded to each of the inwardly facing surface, the outwardly facing surface, and the generally cylindrical barrel portion, wherein the wheel cladding enhances the stiffness and/or strength of the wheel between about 2-16% or greater.

Another aspect of the present disclosure is to provide the composite wheel assembly having an aerodynamic envelop.

Another aspect of the present disclosure is to provide the composite wheel assembly having a minimal envelop and weight.

Another aspect of the present disclosure is to provide the wheel cladding having a decorative outwardly facing surface.

In accordance with yet another aspect of the present disclosure, a method of constructing a composite wheel assembly is provided. The method includes providing a wheel having an inwardly facing surface, an outwardly facing surface, and a generally cylindrical barrel portion, with a plurality of apertures formed about a central hub aperture. Further, increasing the stiffness and/or strength of the wheel between about 2-16% or greater by fixedly bonding a wheel cladding to at least one of the inwardly facing surface, the outwardly facing surface and the generally cylindrical barrel portion.

Another aspect of the method of construction includes providing the wheel cladding being formed of at least one of the following materials: carbon fiber, fiber-glass, molded thermoplastic or thermoset polymer, Kevlar®, an alternative metal, or any other non-standard plastic material.

Another aspect of the method of construction includes permanently bonding the wheel cladding to the wheel via at least one of a urethane foam, a room temperature vulcanization silicone adhesive, or an alternate adhesive, such as epoxy or silicone-based hot melt adhesive.

These and other aspects and areas of applicability will become apparent from the description provided herein. The description and specific examples in this summary are intended for purpose of illustration only and are not intended to limit the scope of the present disclosure.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The drawings described herein are for illustrative purposes only of selected aspects and not all implementations, and are not intended to limit the present disclosure to only that actually shown. With this in mind, various features and advantages of example aspects of the present disclosure will become apparent to one possessing ordinary skill in the art from the following written description and appended claims when considered in combination with the appended drawings, in which:

FIG. 1 is a perspective view of a composite wheel assembly including a wheel and a cladding constructed in accordance with an aspect of the disclosure;

FIG. 1A is a partially exploded perspective view of a composite wheel assembly including a wheel and a cladding constructed in accordance with an aspect of the disclosure;

FIG. 2 is a partial exploded perspective view of a wheel assembly including a plurality of wheel backside inserts in accordance with an aspect of the disclosure;

FIG. 3 is a partial exploded view of a wheel assembly including a plurality of wheel backside inserts secured thereto with a foam in accordance with an aspect of the disclosure;

FIG. 4 is a partial exploded view of a wheel assembly including a plurality of wheel backside inserts secured with a bonding agent in accordance with still another aspect of the disclosure;

FIG. 5 is an exploded view of a wheel assembly with a belly band secured to the wheel rim in accordance with an aspect of the disclosure;

FIG. 5A is a partial cross-sectional view taken the wheel assembly of FIG. 5; and

FIG. 6 is a partial exploded view of a wheel assembly with a plurality of turbine stiffening inserts in accordance with an aspect of the disclosure.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE DISCLOSURE

In the following description, details are set forth to provide an understanding of the present disclosure.

For clarity purposes, example aspects are discussed herein to convey the scope of the disclosure to those skilled in the relevant art. Numerous specific details are set forth such as examples of specific components, devices, and methods, in order to provide a thorough understanding of various aspects of the present disclosure. It will be apparent to those skilled in the art that specific details need not be discussed herein, such as well-known processes, well-known device structures, and well-known technologies, as they are already well

understood by those skilled in the art, and that example embodiments may be embodied in many different forms and that neither should be construed to limit the scope of the disclosure.

The terminology used herein is for the purpose of describing particular example aspects only and is not intended to be limiting. As used herein, the singular forms “a,” “an,” and “the” may be intended to include the plural forms as well, unless the context clearly indicates otherwise. The terms “comprises,” “comprising,” “including,” and “having,” are inclusive and therefore specify the presence of stated features, integers, steps, operations, elements, and/or components, but do not preclude the presence or addition of one or more other features, integers, steps, operations, elements, components, and/or groups thereof. The method steps, processes, and operations described herein are not to be construed as necessarily requiring their performance in the particular order discussed or illustrated, unless specifically identified as an order of performance. It is also to be understood that additional or alternative steps may be employed.

When an element or feature is referred to as being “on,” “engaged to,” “connected to,” “coupled to” “operably connected to” or “in operable communication with” another element or feature, it may be directly on, engaged, connected or coupled to the other element or layer, or intervening elements or features may be present. In contrast, when an element is referred to as being “directly on,” “directly engaged to,” “directly connected to,” or “directly coupled to” another element or feature, there may be no intervening elements or layers present. Other words used to describe the relationship between elements should be interpreted in a like fashion (e.g., “between” versus “directly between,” “adjacent” versus “directly adjacent,” etc.). As used herein, the term “and/or” includes any and all combinations of one or more of the associated listed items.

Although the terms first, second, third, etc. may be used herein to describe various elements, components, regions, layers and/or sections, these elements, components, regions, layers and/or sections should not be limited by these terms. These terms may be only used to distinguish one element, component, region, layer or section from another region, layer or section. Terms such as “first,” “second,” and other numerical terms when used herein do not imply a sequence or order unless clearly and expressly indicated by the context. Thus, a first element, component, region, layer or section discussed below could be termed a second element, component, region, layer or section without departing from the teachings of the example embodiments.

For purposes of description herein, the terms “upper,” “lower,” “right,” “left,” “rear,” “front,” “vertical,” “horizontal,” and derivatives thereof shall relate to the invention as oriented in the FIGS. However, it is to be understood that the present disclosure may assume various alternative orientations and step sequences, except where expressly specified to the contrary. It is also to be understood that the specific devices and processes illustrated in the attached drawings, and described in the following specification are exemplary aspects of the inventive concepts defined in the appended claims. Hence, specific dimensions and other physical characteristics relating to the aspects disclosed herein are not to be considered as limiting, unless the claims expressly state otherwise.

Referring in more detail to the drawings, FIG. 1 illustrates a composite wheel assembly 10 comprising a wheel 12 made of aluminum, magnesium, steel, or other material conventionally used for manufacturing vehicle wheels. The com-

posite wheel assembly 10, in accordance with one aspect of the disclosure, may be constructed by permanently bonding a wheel cladding 14 to a front, outwardly facing surface 16 of the wheel 12. The cladding 14 may be formed, at least in part, of a high strength and/or high stiffness material, thereby functioning not only as a decorative member, but also as a stiffening member to add strength and/or stiffness to the composite wheel assembly 10. An outer surface 18 of the cladding 14 can be painted, textured or otherwise finished to provide a particularly desired aesthetic appearance, such as a metal plated surface, by way of example and without limitation.

The wheel 12 can be formed having a central hub 19 with an opening, also referred to as hub aperture 20, formed therein and about an axis 22 about which the composite wheel assembly 10 rotates. The wheel 12 can further be formed having a plurality of apertures 24 extending through or adjacent the hub 19, with the apertures 24 being arranged in a pattern, such as a circular pattern, and spaced for receipt of lugnuts (not shown) to facilitate fixation of the composite wheel assembly 10 to the desired vehicle platform. The wheel 12 further includes an outer peripheral rim 28, and in accordance with one aspect, a plurality of spokes 34 can be provided to extend radially between the hub 19 and the outer peripheral rim 28, thereby defining a plurality of corresponding windows, also referred to as turbine openings or simply openings 38.

The wheel cladding 14 can be formed having a geometry which substantially conforms to that of the outwardly facing surface 16 of the wheel 12, namely, having an outer peripheral rim 26 which matingly fits within or on top of the outer peripheral rim 28 of the wheel 12. The cladding 14 is shown, by way of example and without limitation, having a plurality of cladding spokes 30 extending radially outward from a centrally-located hub region, shown as having a hub aperture 32, by way of example and without limitation, wherein the cladding spokes 30 correspond in size, shape and location to a plurality of wheel spokes 34. The composite wheel assembly 10 may further include a cap member 48 snappably connected to the wheel 12 and/or to the wheel cladding 14 within the central hub apertures 20, 32 thereof.

Located between the spokes 30 of the cladding 14, a plurality of windows or openings 36 can be provided to align with corresponding ones of the turbine openings 38 of the wheel 12. The openings 36 can be shaped and sized to be the same as the turbine openings 38 to mate therewith, or they could be sized differently, either smaller and/or larger, or shaped differently, depending on the aesthetic desired. A recessed central hub region 40 surrounds the central hub aperture 32 of the cladding 14, that also includes a plurality of lugnut receiving apertures 42 which align and register with the apertures 24 of the wheel 12 when the wheel cladding 14 is fixedly attached to the wheel 12. The hub aperture 32 is aligned and registered with the hub aperture 20 in the wheel 12 upon fixing the cladding 14 to the wheel 12. As a result, the wheel cladding 14 appears as an integral, aesthetically pleasing outwardly facing surface of the composite wheel assembly 10.

The wheel cladding 14 is provided to enhance the strength and/or stiffness of the wheel 12, and thus, the wheel 12 can be formed having minimal material, minimal overall envelop, and thus, minimal weight, which are all desired for modern wheel assemblies of high performance vehicles. Some of the high strength, high stiffness materials contemplated for the wheel cladding 14 include carbon fiber, fiber-glass, molded thermoplastic or thermoset polymer, Kevlar®, an alternative metal, or any other non-standard

plastic material that would significantly enhance the stiffness and/or strength of the wheel 12, wherein the aforementioned materials can be used individually or in any desired combination with one another. The cladding 14 can be provided having the desired thickness for the intended application, wherein a thickness between about 1-3 mm is considered preferential, though slightly decreased or increased deviations up to about 50% are contemplated herein.

In assembly, the cladding 14 can be bonded to the wheel 12 via continuous or segmented beads of a bonding adhesive (s) that is sufficiently rigid to transfer the applied loads from the wheel 12 to the cladding 14, thereby enhancing the overall strength and bending stiffness of the wheel assembly 10 as a whole. Some exemplary aspects of a suitable adhesive include a urethane foam, room temperature vulcanization silicone adhesive (RTV), or an alternate adhesive, such as epoxy, silicone-based hot melt adhesive, or any other suitable adhesive that would permanently fix the wheel cladding 14 to the wheel 12 for the duration of the useful life of the vehicle. It is to be recognized that the selected adhesive can be placed on an inner surface of the cladding material 14 and/or on the outwardly facing surface 16 of the wheel 12 as a continuous layer or in sections or patterns, as desired. Once a bead of the adhesive is applied to at least one of the fixating inner surface of the cladding 14 and/or to the fixating outer surface 16 of the wheel 12, the wheel cladding 14 is aligned with the wheel 12, as desired, and the wheel cladding 14 is then pressed against the outwardly facing surface 16 of the wheel 12 for permanent fixation thereto. In one present exemplary aspect, a wheel cladding 14 may be constructed of a carbon fiber having a thickness of about 1 mm, wherein the cladding 14 can be bonded to the wheel 12 via an adhesive of RTV along with injected urethane foam, with the wheel assembly 10 resulting in an increased bending stiffness between about 2-16%, and preferably between about 8-16%, as compared to the wheel 12 not having the cladding 14, when deflection was measured at the outer peripheral rim 28 in areas at the end of the wheel spokes 34 and at the center of an arc that spans a wheel window 38 at the outer peripheral rim 28.

According to a still further aspect, while the cladding 14 may be a monolithic, single piece, full face structure that is permanently bonded to the wheel 12 to impart stiffness, the cladding 14 may alternatively consist of a multiple piece assembly. For example, the cladding 14 may be formed of a plastic painted or metal plated polymeric structure with a stiffening backing structure fixedly secured to the rear surface of the cladding 14. According to an aspect, the stiffening backing structure may be disposed along the entire back side of the cladding 14 or alternatively may be disposed in select locations in order to impart stiffness, as desired. The backside of the cladding 14 with the stiffening backing structure may be a non-aesthetic structure that imparts stiffness and can be constructed of a variety of suitable materials, including as described herein.

FIG. 1A illustrates a wheel assembly 110 in accordance with another aspect, wherein the same reference numerals as used above, offset by a factor of 100, are used to identify like features. The wheel assembly 110 includes a plurality of cladding stiffening members 14' that may be discretely placed on the front, outwardly facing surface 116 of the wheel 112 to serve decorative, strengthening and stiffening functions. For example, the cladding stiffening members 14' may be disposed on the front, outwardly facing surface 116 of at least some or each of the wheel spokes 134, and can be disposed within recessed pockets 34' formed within at least some or each of the wheel spokes 134, shown as being

formed between opposite sides of each of the spokes **134**, by way of example and without limitation, with the remaining portions of the wheel outwardly facing surface **116** remaining exposed for aesthetic viewing. Furthermore, it is to be recognized that aside from the cladding stiffening members **14'**, it will also be appreciated that a purely decorative cladding or wheel cover may be secured to one or more portions of the front, outwardly facing surface **116** of the wheel **112**. Further yet, in addition to the cladding stiffening members **14'** on the outwardly facing surface **116**, one or more cladding stiffening members **14'** can be disposed on sides of the spokes **134**, or in the turbine openings **138** to both add structural integrity and strength to the wheel **112** and for decorative purposes as well. Further yet, stiffening members, as discussed further below, may be secured to the backside of the spokes **134**.

FIG. 2 illustrates a wheel assembly **210** in accordance with another aspect, wherein the same reference numerals as used above, offset by a factor of 200, are used to identify like features. The wheel assembly **210** includes a wheel **212**. The wheel assembly **210** is shown not having a wheel cladding attached to an outwardly facing surface **216** of the wheel **212**, though it will also be appreciated that the wheel assembly **210** could include a cladding fixed to the outer surface **216**, if desired. The wheel **212** may include an outer peripheral rim **228** and a central hub opening **220**. The wheel **212** can include a plurality of spokes **234** that extend generally between the central hub **219** and the outer peripheral rim **228**. The plurality of spokes **234** can define a plurality of wheel turbine openings **238**.

According to an aspect, at least some or each of the plurality of spokes **234** may have wheel claddings, referred to hereafter as insert portions **215**, secured to an inwardly facing surface thereof, also referred to as backside or inner side **217**. The backside **217** of the spokes **234** may include recessed pockets **234'** formed therein, with the recessed pockets **234'** shown as extending between opposite sides of each of the spokes **234**, by way of example and without limitation, which are each configured to receive the insert portions **215**. The insert portions **215** may be snap fit or otherwise secured to the backside **217** of the wheel **212** within the pockets **234'**. The insert portions **215** may be formed of a high strength, tough material, as discussed above, in order to impart added stiffness to the wheel **212**. For example, the insert portions **215** may be formed of a carbon fiber, fiber-glass, molded thermoplastic or thermoset polymer, Kevlar®, an alternative metal or any other non-standard plastic material that would significantly enhance the stiffness and/or strength of the wheel **212**. According to an aspect, the use of the stiffening insert portions **215** can significantly increase the stiffness and strength of the wheel assembly **210**. It will be appreciated that any number of insert portions **215** may be employed as desired.

FIG. 3 illustrates a wheel assembly **310** in accordance with another aspect, wherein the same reference numerals as used above, offset by a factor of 300, are used to identify like features. The wheel assembly includes a wheel cladding **14** attached to an outwardly facing surface **316** of the wheel **312**. It will also be appreciated that the wheel assembly **310** may have a decorative outer surface without a cladding. The wheel **312** may include an outer peripheral rim **328** and a central hub opening **320**. The wheel **312** can include a plurality of spokes **334** that extend generally between the central hub **319** and the outer peripheral rim **328**. The plurality of spokes **334** may define a plurality of wheel turbine openings **338**.

According to an aspect, the plurality of spokes **334** may have wheel claddings, referred to hereafter as insert portions **315**, secured to a backside or inner side **317** thereof. The spokes **334** may include pockets **334'** formed therein which are configured to receive the insert portions **315**. The insert portions **315** may be secured to the backside **317** of the wheel **312**, such as within the pockets **334'** such as by a high strength foam adhesive **50**. It will be appreciated that a variety of the suitable adhesives may be employed. The insert portions **315** may be formed of a material in order to impart added stiffness to the wheel **312**. For example, the insert portions **315** may be formed of a carbon fiber, fiber-glass, molded thermoplastic or thermoset polymer, Kevlar®, an alternative metal or any other non-standard plastic material that would significantly enhance the stiffness and/or strength of the wheel **312**. According to an aspect, the use of the stiffening insert portions **315** and the stiffening cladding **14** can significantly increase the stiffness and strength of the wheel assembly **310**. It will be appreciated that any number of insert portions **315** may be employed as desired.

FIG. 4 illustrates a wheel assembly **410** in accordance with another aspect, wherein the same reference numerals as used above, offset by a factor of 400, are used to identify like features. The wheel assembly includes a wheel cladding **14** attached to an outwardly facing surface **416** of the wheel **412**. The wheel **412** may include an outer peripheral rim **428** and a central hub **419** having a central hub opening **420**. The wheel **412** can include a plurality of spokes **434** that extend generally between the central hub **419** and the outer peripheral rim **428**. The plurality of spokes **434** may define a plurality of wheel turbine openings **438**.

According to an aspect, the plurality of spokes **434** may have wheel claddings, referred to hereafter as insert portions **415** secured to a backside or inner side **417** thereof. The spokes **434** may include pockets **434'** formed therein which are configured to receive the insert portions **415**. The insert portions **415** may be secured to the backside **417** of the wheel **412**, such as within the pockets **434'** such as by a high strength bonding agent. It will be appreciated that a variety of the suitable adhesives may be employed. The insert portions **415** may be formed of a material in order to impart added stiffness to the wheel **412**. For example, the insert portions **415** may be formed of a carbon fiber, fiber-glass, molded thermoplastic or thermoset polymer, Kevlar®, an alternative metal or any other non-standard plastic material that would significantly enhance the stiffness and/or strength of the wheel **412**. According to an aspect, the use of the stiffening insert portions **415** and the stiffening cladding **14** can significantly increase the stiffness and strength of the wheel assembly **410**. It will be appreciated that any number of insert portions **415** may be employed as desired.

FIG. 5 illustrates a wheel assembly **510** in accordance with another aspect, wherein the same reference numerals as used above, offset by a factor of 500, are used to identify like features. The wheel assembly includes a wheel cladding **14** attached to an outwardly facing surface **516** of the wheel **512**. The wheel **512** may include an outer peripheral rim **528** and a central hub **519** bounding an opening **520**. The wheel **512** can include a plurality of spokes **534** that extend generally between the central hub **519** and the outer peripheral rim **528**. The plurality of spokes **534** may define a plurality of wheel turbine openings **538**.

According to an aspect, a further wheel cladding in the form of a stiffening member, and in particular, in the form of an annular, generally cylindrical stiffening belly band web, also referred to as annular stiffening band or web **52**, may be secured about an annular, generally cylindrical

barrel portion **54** of the wheel **512** to impart strength and stiffness to the wheel **512**. The annular web **52** may be formed of a carbon fiber, fiber-glass, molded thermoplastic or thermoset polymer, Kevlar®, an alternative metal or any other non-standard plastic material that would significantly enhance the stiffness and/or strength of the wheel **512**. It will be appreciated that a variety of other suitable materials may be employed. The annular web **52** may be disposed, such as by being wound or wrapped, around a radially outwardly facing surface, also referred to as backside **55** (tire side), of the annular barrel portion **54** of the wheel **512** and secured to the outwardly facing surface **55** with a high strength bonding agent. To facilitate wrapping the web **52** about the outwardly facing surface **55**, the web **52** can be provided having a through split **56** to allow opposite free ends **58**, **59** of the web **52** to be spread away from one another to temporarily expand the web **52** for ready disposal about the outwardly facing surface **55** of the barrel portion **54**, whereupon the web **52** can be returned to constrict into abutment with the outwardly facing surface **55** of the barrel portion **54** and fixed thereto via a high strength bonding agent. Alternatively, or in combination, as shown in FIG. 5A, the annular web **52** may be applied to abut a radially inwardly facing surface, also referred to as inner side **57** (rotor side), of the annular barrel portion **54** of the wheel **512** and secured with a high strength bonding agent. It will be appreciated that a variety of other suitable adhesives may be employed. The annular web **52** can provide for added hoop stiffness of the barrel portion **54** of the wheel **512** and potential natural frequency change of the barrel portion in a positive direction to be even more dissimilar than the tire normal frequency. According to a still further aspect, the backside or inner side **517** of the wheel **512** may include recessed pockets **534'** formed therein. The recessed pockets **534'** may serve a weight relief function and may also receive inert portions, as discussed above with regard to FIGS. 2-4.

FIG. 6 illustrates a wheel assembly **610** in accordance with another aspect, wherein the same reference numerals as used above, offset by a factor of 600, are used to identify like features. The wheel assembly includes a wheel cladding **14** attached to an outwardly facing surface **616** of the wheel **612**. The wheel **612** may include an outer peripheral rim **628** and a central hub opening **620**. The wheel **612** can include a plurality of wheel spokes **634** that extend generally between the central hub **619** and the outer peripheral rim **628**. The plurality of spokes **634** may define a plurality of wheel turbine through openings **638**.

According to an aspect, the wheel assembly **610** may include a plurality of wheel claddings, referred to hereafter as insert portions or stiffening members **615**, disposed in at least one or each of the wheel turbine openings **638** between the wheel spokes **634** in order to impart stiffness to the wheel **612**. The stiffening members **615** are shown in a non-limiting aspect as being annular and circumferentially continuous, wherein the stiffening members **615** may be secured within the wheel turbine openings **638** by a high strength bonding agent, with the stiffening members **615** being fixed to sides of the spokes **634** and to a radially inwardly facing inside surface adjacent the wheel barrel portion. However, a variety of other suitable adhesives or fixation mechanisms may also be employed. These stiffening members **615** may be painted a complimentary color to the wheel **612** or may have a natural carbon fiber look. Again, these stiffening members **615** may be formed of a variety of different materials, including carbon fiber tape, aramid, Kevlar, glass fiber or a variety of other suitable materials. These stiffening members **615** may be used in conjunction with a cladding **14**

or other stiffening members as disclosed herein. It will also be appreciated that other stiffening features as disclosed herein may also be employed.

According to an aspect, the adhesive used herein may be selected to transfer stiffness from the wheel **12**, **112**, **212**, **312**, **412**, **512**, **612** to the cladding/stiffening member such that the wheel assembly **10**, **110**, **210**, **310**, **410**, **510**, **610** has the desired increased wheel stiffness. The material employed for the cladding/stiffening member may be selected such that it has a modulus of elasticity, which combined with its moment of inertia, will result in stiffness of the cladding/stiffening member.

According to an aspect, the present disclosed composite wheel assembly **10**, **110**, **210**, **310**, **410**, **510**, **610**, including the wheel **12**, **112**, **212**, **312**, **412**, **512**, **612** and wheel cladding/insert or stiffening member, can reduce the amount of material required to construct the composite wheel assembly **10**, **110**, **210**, **310**, **410**, **510**, **610**, thereby reducing the weight of the composite wheel assembly **10**, **110**, **210**, **310**, **410**, **510**, **610**.

The foregoing description of the embodiments has been provided for purposes of illustration and description. It is not intended to be exhaustive or to limit the disclosure. Individual elements or features of a particular embodiment are generally not limited to that particular embodiment, but, where applicable, are interchangeable and can be used in a selected embodiment, even if not specifically shown or described. The same may also be varied in many ways. Such variations are not to be regarded as a departure from the disclosure, and all such modifications are intended to be included within the scope of disclosure.

What is claimed is:

1. A composite wheel assembly, comprising:

a wheel having an inwardly facing surface and an outwardly facing surface, a plurality of apertures formed about a central hub aperture, a plurality of wheel spokes extending radially outwardly from the central hub aperture, and a plurality of turbine openings formed between the plurality of spokes; and

at least one wheel cladding fixedly bonded to at least the outwardly facing surface of the wheel; and

at least one stiffening member secured to the wheel, wherein at least a portion of the at least one stiffening member overlies a portion of an outer or inner face of one of the plurality of spokes and covers a recess extending into the spoke from the outer or inner face, wherein an opening of the recess is greater than a base surface of the recess;

wherein the wheel cladding and the at least one stiffening member enhance the stiffness and/or strength of the wheel between about 2-16% or greater.

2. The composite wheel assembly of claim 1, wherein the at least one wheel cladding is formed of material consisting of at least one of carbon fiber, fiber-glass, molded thermoplastic or thermoset polymer, or heat-resistant synthetic fiber.

3. The composite wheel assembly of claim 1, wherein the at least one wheel cladding is bonded to the wheel via at least one of a urethane foam, a room temperature vulcanization silicone adhesive, epoxy, or silicone-based hot melt adhesive.

4. The composite wheel assembly of claim 1, wherein the at least one wheel cladding includes a single, monolithic piece of material having a central hub region, an outer peripheral rim, and a plurality of spokes extending radially between the central hub region and the outer peripheral rim fixed to the outwardly facing surface of the wheel.

11

5. The composite wheel assembly of claim 1, further comprising a plurality of stiffening members, each disposed on a respective one of the plurality of wheel spokes.

6. The composite wheel assembly of claim 5, further comprising: a plurality of recesses with a recess disposed on each of the plurality of spokes, each of the plurality of recesses extending into the outwardly facing surface and wherein the plurality of stiffening members are secured in a respective one of the recesses.

7. The composite wheel assembly of claim 5, further comprising: a plurality of recesses with a recess disposed on each of the plurality of spokes, each of the plurality of recesses formed on the inwardly facing surface of the spokes and wherein the plurality of stiffening members are secured in a respective one of the recesses.

8. The composite wheel assembly of claim 7, wherein the plurality of stiffening members are secured within the relief pocket by at least one of a mechanical fastener, a high strength foam adhesive, or a high strength bonding agent.

9. The composite wheel assembly of claim 1, wherein the at least one stiffening member is formed of material consisting of at least one of carbon fiber, fiber-glass, molded thermoplastic or thermoset polymer, or heat-resistant synthetic fiber.

10. A composite wheel assembly, comprising:

a wheel having an inwardly facing surface and an outwardly facing surface, a plurality of apertures formed about a central hub aperture, a plurality of wheel spokes extending radially outwardly from the central hub aperture, and a plurality of turbine openings formed between the plurality of spokes; and

at least one wheel cladding fixedly bonded to at least the outwardly facing surface of the wheel; and

at least one stiffening member secured to the wheel;

wherein the wheel cladding and the at least one stiffening member enhance the stiffness and/or strength of the wheel between about 2-16% or greater;

wherein the at least one stiffening member includes an annular stiffening band secured to a generally cylindrical barrel portion of the wheel to impart stiffness to the wheel.

11. The composite wheel assembly of claim 10, wherein the annular stiffening band abuts a radially outwardly facing outer surface of the generally cylindrical barrel portion.

12. The composite wheel assembly of claim 10, wherein the annular stiffening band abuts a radially inwardly facing inner surface of the generally cylindrical barrel portion.

13. A composite wheel assembly, comprising:

a wheel having an inwardly facing surface and an outwardly facing surface, a plurality of apertures formed about a central hub aperture, a plurality of wheel spokes extending radially outwardly from the central hub aperture, and a plurality of turbine openings formed between the plurality of spokes; and

at least one wheel cladding fixedly bonded to at least the outwardly facing surface of the wheel; and

at least one stiffening member secured to the wheel;

wherein the wheel cladding and the at least one stiffening member enhance the stiffness and/or strength of the wheel between about 2-16% or greater;

12

wherein the at least one stiffening member consists of a plurality annular wheel stiffening members fixed within the turbine openings.

14. A composite wheel assembly, comprising:

a wheel having an inwardly facing surface, an outwardly facing surface, a generally cylindrical barrel portion, and a plurality of apertures formed about a central hub aperture;

at least one wheel cladding fixedly bonded to the outwardly facing surface, wherein the wheel cladding is constructed of a non-standard plastic material in order to provide enhanced stiffness and strength; and

at least one stiffening member secured to the wheel;

wherein the wheel cladding and the at least one stiffening member enhance the stiffness and/or strength of the wheel assembly between about 2-16% or greater;

wherein at least a portion of the at least one stiffening member overlies a portion of an outer or inner face of one of a plurality of spokes and covers a recess extending into the spoke from the outer or inner face, wherein an opening of the recess is greater than a base surface of the recess.

15. The composite wheel assembly of claim 14, wherein the wheel cladding and the at least one stiffening member are formed of materials consisting of at least one of carbon fiber, fiber-glass, molded thermoplastic or thermoset polymer, or heat-resistant synthetic fiber.

16. The composite wheel assembly of claim 15, wherein the at least one stiffening member includes an annular stiffening band secured to the generally cylindrical barrel portion of the wheel.

17. The composite wheel assembly of claim 15, wherein the at least one wheel cladding includes a single, monolithic piece of material having a central hub region, an outer peripheral rim, and a plurality of spokes extending radially between the central hub region and the outer peripheral rim fixed to the outwardly facing surface of the wheel.

18. The composite wheel assembly of claim 17, further comprising: a plurality of stiffening members fixed to the inwardly facing surface of the wheel.

19. A method of constructing a composite wheel assembly, comprising:

providing a wheel having an inwardly facing surface, an outwardly facing surface, a generally cylindrical barrel portion, and a plurality of apertures formed about a central hub aperture; and

fixedly bonding at least one wheel cladding to outwardly facing surface of the wheel; and

attaching at least one stiffening member to the wheel, wherein at least a portion of the at least one stiffening member overlies a portion of an outer or inner face of one of a plurality of spokes and covers a recess extending into the spoke from the outer or inner face, wherein an opening of the recess is greater than a base surface of the recess;

whereby the enhancing the stiffness and/or strength of the wheel is enhanced between 2-16% or greater.